



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE SCHOOL REVIEW

A JOURNAL OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

VOLUME XVIII
NUMBER I

JANUARY, 1910

WHOLE
NUMBER 171

THE COMMERCIAL HIGH SCHOOL AND THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY¹

F. V. THOMPSON
High School of Commerce, Boston

Granted that commercial schools should have a practical connection with business affairs, there arises the question as to how such a relation may be brought about. The scheme of administration usual in public schools does not lend itself easily to definite relations with outside forces, and indefinite and casual connections are not productive of appreciable results. There is need of definite machinery if substantial good is to be obtained.

The methods pursued in Europe are natural and simple as well as highly effective. But the European commercial school had a different origin and a longer history than has ours. Consistent progress from the beginning makes the present standing of these schools more than satisfactory, whereas in this country we have scarcely admitted the principle upon which educational practice may proceed. Public commercial schools in this country have had no similar origin nor so long a history. Today we

¹This article is the third in a series of articles by headmasters and principals, treating of the administrative problems of various types of secondary schools. The first article of the series, "The Aims, Duties, and Opportunities of the Headmaster of an Endowed Secondary School," by Dr. Endicott Peabody, Headmaster of the Groton School, appeared in the October number of the *School Review*, Vol. XVII, pp. 521-28. The second article, "The Social Organization of the High School," by Franklin Winslow Johnson, Dean of the University High School, the University of Chicago, appeared in the December number of the *School Review*, Vol. XVII, pp. 665-80.—Ed. *School Review*.

find that the situation of self-sufficiency is inadequate and are consequently obliged to add to an already established system a new element, and a new element which does not promise easy absorption into our public-school organization.

The commercial schools of Germany are the creation largely of business men. The Chamber of Commerce of the German city is the "godfather" of the commercial school. It is the business man who is looked to for sponsorship and advice in the administration of commercial schools. In Milan the director of the commercial school (*Scuola Bocconi*) is at the same time the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce. There is a lesson here for us. The schoolmaster who has to do with the preparation of young people and the business man who receives the product of the school have a common interest, and a position of mutual aloofness is consequently abnormal.

It is undeniable that attempted vocational schools in our own country have had but little connection with vocations. This has been true in a striking degree of the two types of applied education which are the more recent developments of the public secondary school systems of this country, namely, manual-training schools and commercial departments in high schools. The manual-training high school has until recently found virtue in the fact that no trade or art is specifically aimed at. Similarly, commercial courses in high schools have had but small connection with actual business practice.

Too great dependence upon textbooks has been a drawback in the conduct of vocational courses. In fact, the excessive use of textbooks has been a potent factor in the failure of the vocational school in general to comprehend and properly equip for vocations. Over-reliance upon textbooks has naturally caused the teachers to feel little responsibility for personal investigation. Commercial textbooks purport to be founded upon close observation of actual conditions, and the teacher has accepted these books unquestioningly.

There will be marked differences as to methods of attainment as well as to the extent of such an interrelation between vocation and school. There are undoubtedly bounds beyond which it will

be futile to seek to bring actual business conditions into the school. There are essential differences between the nature of business and that of the school. The school is a more altruistic force than business, and must always continue to be so.

For very survival the business institution is forced to apply the elemental law of self-preservation; the individual in the system who lacks adaptation is turned out. Whereas the school must not forget its mission to make the best possible out of individuals within its care. The human waste product, thoughtlessly thrown out, becomes a menace to society, which supports the school. Briefly, business is individualistic in aim, whereas the school must be in some degree paternal.

What then should be the limit which shall define how far the school must go in its efforts to serve the particular class and yet conserve the interests of society? The writer would answer the query by saying that the commercial school should go as far toward bringing into the school actual business conditions as is consistent with the higher purpose of the school—a free foundation of a free people, where each individual may make the best possible out of the gifts with which Nature has endowed him.

The exact application of the above principle will rest with those governing the policies of commercial schools and other vocational schools. Upon their wisdom will depend the proper balance to be maintained. Especially while these schools are in the experimental stage will there be extremes either of aloofness from business affairs or servile imitation thereof. It is to be hoped that some rough norm may finally be established for the guidance and standardization of educational practice.

But the business school at present has more to learn than to fear from contact with practical business affairs. The evil has been, not that the school was jealous of its higher prerogatives, but rather that the school was oblivious of the fact that there has been anything to learn from outside sources. The business man and the schoolmaster have been in the past too far apart. Both have considered that there was little common ground. The business man has looked upon the schoolmaster as one who is doing a kind of work in society which is admittedly useful, but

whose efforts affect business development but little. In turn, the schoolmaster has regarded the business man as one whose opinions were of little consequence so far as pedagogical practice is concerned, and as one who does not comprehend or sympathize with the difficulties of school administration.

There are, broadly speaking, three forces within the schools themselves which must co-operate harmoniously if we are to incorporate this new force into our system. These are, first, the school committee or board of education, under whose authority city charters place the control and major policies of the schools; second, the superintendent and supervisors, who constitute largely the executive officers of school committees; third, the principals and teachers, who have to do with the conduct of specific schools. The principal and teachers of a particular school can do little if the powers higher up are antagonistic or apathetic.

Then there is the business community itself to be reckoned with. It is a wrong assumption to claim that this force has always been, or is today, right minded upon effective schemes of co-operation between school and vocation. Business men have idiosyncrasies as well as schoolmasters, although none can deny that the competition for existence more quickly eliminates these from positions of activity than is true in the pedagogical world. Then again, there are successful business men who are mere doctrinaires, or perhaps cranks, upon questions relating to educational practice.

From generalizations we may come to the concrete by describing the specific plan which has been in practice at the High School of Commerce of Boston. The plan as outlined cannot be offered as possible of close imitation in other cities. The conditions of each city must govern the local plan. It is the opinion of the writer that some practical plan may be found in each city if conditions with respect to the co-operating forces are not found to be abnormal.

Beginning with the three co-operating forces within the school system of Boston, some detail in regard to each may prove of value. The school committee of Boston may first be considered in its relations to the experiment now under way. By legislative

enactment the old school committee of twenty-four was replaced by a committee of five, similar in all respects concerning duties, rights, and powers, with the single difference of number. This change was effected in 1906. The High School of Commerce was one of the first creations of the new committee. The superior effectiveness which the new committee at once exhibited was a fortunate condition for the school. The concentration of power into the hands of a few more carefully selected, better equipped, and more responsible members made the possibility of co-operative relations of the school and the business world much easier than would have been true under the old régime. Even with the best of intentions the old committee, by its very constitution, never rose above the level of a popular assembly where cliques and party interests rendered the result of all deliberations not the best method to pursue, but the best compromise to be obtained. The new committee was better able to guide the destinies of a business school, and the directness and vigor of their procedure may be seen in two chief methods adopted for launching the project of a special school of commerce.

First, a systematic study was made of existing forms of commercial education, similar to what was contemplated in Boston. The committee in a body visited the New York High School of Commerce, examined its work, and considered its merits. The headmaster of the new institution in Boston was appointed sufficiently in advance of the opening of the school to enable him to travel, investigate, and study his problem. The headmaster not only visited the schools of this country, but spent some months abroad studying the older and justly celebrated commercial schools of Europe. Second, the school committee invited to serve and caused to be organized a representative committee of business men, which should advise the new school in its initial policies and guide the school in its development.

Simultaneously with the new school committee came the election of a new superintendent, a change in the constitution of the Board of Superintendents, and a general reorganization of the Boston school system. Before this period there was a wide divergence of educational practice among both the elementary

and secondary schools. The new school officials immediately set about the problem of organization. Uniformity and standardization seemed to be the chief needs of the system as a whole. With the definite policy of the administrative officers turned toward an evil which hitherto had appeared almost a virtue, a rapid readjustment was brought about in all the separate schools. This reform, while on the whole favorable to the new school, had within it certain dangers. Standardization presupposes a type, and when the process is applied to school administration the type selected must necessarily be something which past experience has proved to be good. A school system as a whole may be immensely benefited by the standardizing process, but a new and experimental school may be very much handicapped and restricted by it. Corroboratory testimony from an eminent authority on commercial education may be aptly brought in at this point. President James wrote the warning some years before any commercial high schools had been established in this country:

It is undoubtedly true that in the long run we shall have to rely upon public institutions to accomplish the most general and widespread results, but there is also just as little doubt that more rapid progress might be made if some private individual or corporation would take up the matter and give a commercial high school which could serve as a model for our city boards. For the history of education in this country shows conclusively that the spirit of routine and formalism which nearly invariably prevails in any public-school system is unfavorable to rapid and thoroughgoing improvement; inasmuch as it is unfavorable to experimentation, and experimentation is necessary to progress.

It is doubtful whether a special school in any centralized school system can be allowed to enjoy a freedom from restriction which a private institution has. But against this must be weighed compensating privileges. The dignity and majesty of the state, in a sense, surround the public institution, and many services will be offered or can be commanded on that account. On the whole, it may be said that the development of the vocational side of the High School of Commerce has not been made unduly hard by restrictions from supervising officers, and the

evils hinted at by Dr. James have been avoided as far as was consistent with the larger needs of the school system.

The attitude of the school itself, the principal, and teachers may next be treated as the third co-operating force in the problem under consideration. It is natural to find here more concern, enthusiasm, and energy than in either of the two more exalted forces. What may appear as an incident in the view of the chief executive becomes the factor of large magnitude for those upon whose shoulders must fall the special burden. Of the many elements that might be pointed to as indicative of the spirit of the school toward the vocation, the one of efficient internal organization only will be dealt with in detail. The importance of definite machinery and the ineffectiveness of haphazard schemes have already been mentioned. As an illustration of these principles applied to the question under discussion may be stated here the plan pursued in the High School of Commerce. It is believed that the plan of organization of the school offers favorable conditions for considerable achievement. The school is organized with six departments, namely, English, modern languages, economics, mathematics, business technique, and science. The heads of these departments are men of superior ability, training, and attainments, and are paid a correspondingly higher salary. These men are the experts of the school; they are responsible for the educational standards maintained in their subjects, and the vocational relation which the school bears to the business community is in a large degree in their hands. These men bring to the less experienced teachers of their departments the information and guidance necessary to perform their work. In this way it is possible to use effectively teachers who have not the advantage of special training in commercial work. This method of procedure may be best illustrated by stating in brief how several of these department heads bring about the vocational relation of the school.

The head of the department of economics has charge of all subjects dealing with business theory—such as commercial geography, local industries, *economic* history, *economic* theory, etc. He makes investigations into the field about him, con-

sults with business authorities, and makes himself acquainted at first hand with the business conditions of the community. He arranges for a series of weekly talks given by business men before the whole school; he organizes special supplementary courses given by business experts, not teachers by profession; he conducts excursions to business houses where students may see in operation the machinery of business; he collects material for the commercial museum and acquaints himself with the best literature appearing in his field, and in this connection sees that the commercial library is supplied with approved books upon economic questions.

The head of the department of mathematics studies the business field for practical methods for the schoolroom. The present incumbent spent a summer vacation in the actuarial department of a large insurance company in order to experience the actual touch with practical affairs, and learn through personal experience the standards governing the applications of business principles in his department. He studies the methods and processes of mathematics in use in representative business houses; it is his duty to supplant traditional practices with the more approved forms which are constantly being developed in business houses; he collects typical problems peculiar to the businesses which the students are likely to enter.

The head of the department of business technique has the special training necessary to qualify him for his position. He is a certified public accountant, and has had ample experience in the accounting part of business to make him well able to train the young men in this field. His duties are similar to those of the teachers described above, with the difference that his contributions pertain to his special field. He studies contemporary practice and keeps his department abreast of newer ideas.

The accompanying circular letter recently sent to business houses explains the matter of summer employment. This plan, which has proven so valuable in application, is the direct result of the suggestion of the Business Men's Committee. It illus-

trates another phase of valuable co-operation between the business community and the school. Following is the letter:

Dear Sir:

As perhaps you know, the High School of Commerce has been established to give young men an education with the definite intent of making them efficient in commercial enterprises. Business men who are closely in touch with the work of the school feel that the pupils will benefit by any experience which during their school course they can secure in actual business affairs. We therefore wish to obtain for a number of our pupils the opportunity to work in a business house during the summer vacation. If you care to grant this opportunity in your own firm, we ask permission to send to your employment agent one or two properly selected young men from our upper classes.

The young men who will thus offer their services desire chiefly to secure experience: whatever work you assign to them they will be willing to undertake, and whatever compensation you think they earn they will accept. In general, however, our pupils are preparing to engage in one of the four following lines: accounting, buying, selling, secretarial work. It may be that the vacations which you give to your employees will render acceptable the services of a beginner in one or more of these departments. As our pupils wish to secure work in the line they hope eventually to enter, we should be glad to know in which of these departments applications would be welcome.

We venture to hope that beyond the satisfaction which the services of these young men may give, the merchants of Boston will feel pleasure in forwarding in this way the work of the city's public High School of Commerce. The young men will carry to you our estimate of their abilities; in return, we should be glad to receive the estimate formed of them by their superiors in the houses they enter. By this exchange of estimates both the pupils and the school can benefit. Co-operation of this sort between German commercial schools and German business men has given to German commerce the ascendancy it now holds. In our own country the Commercial School of the University of Illinois has secured like co-operation with excellent results. By the urgent advice of our Advisory Board of twenty-five business men, we now ask your help in obtaining for our school a practical laboratory in the business houses of Boston.

The plan which is outlined above was tried last summer in the case of second- and third-year pupils, all of whom earned the commendation of the business houses in which they were employed. They returned to school with statements in regard to their ability from their employers, and proved to be better fitted by their summer experience to profit by the instruction which this school gives.

We should be very much pleased to receive your offer of co-operation in this matter of summer employment.

Yours very truly,

Headmaster of the High School of Commerce

During the past summer traveling scholarships were established through the public spirit of certain Boston business men. Two young men from the senior class of the school were sent on a trip of visitation and observation to the east coast of South America. They visited such larger cities as Buenos Ayres, Montevideo, Rio de Janeiro, Santos, etc. The young men were chosen upon examination in such subjects as modern languages, economics, and knowledge of commercial conditions in South America. The successful candidates upon returning made to the Business Men's Committee an official report covering the results of their investigations.

The good results effected by these scholarships are many. Chief of all, perhaps, is the spreading of the idea among our young men of the importance of foreign markets, the necessity of preparing carefully and specifically for this new and promising field of enterprises, and the acquaintance, at first hand, with the commercial conditions in foreign countries where we may have trade expectations—a knowledge which at present is sadly lacking. Interest and enthusiasm were developed by the reports of the student representatives.

As a final topic may be described the Advisory Committee of Business Men, before referred to. This committee has been a strong factor in whatever co-operation has been effected between the school and the business community. The body is composed of twenty-five members chosen from the chief business organizations of Boston (Chamber of Commerce, Merchants' Association, etc.). This committee has served since the beginning of the school in 1906. It was organized at the request of the chairman of the school committee, Mr. James J. Storrow, and serves during the pleasure of the legally established officers. It has no inherent authority and acts merely in an advisory capacity to the High School of Commerce. The plan of organization is simple and effective. The Committee has selected from its num-

ber an executive body of five whose duty it is to examine in detail the various questions affecting the school, and this small body meets once a month for this purpose. The general committee meets semi-annually, listens to the report of the executive committee, and takes such action as is deemed appropriate. The conclusions of the advisory committee are transmitted in the form of resolutions to the school committee.

The advisory committee has rendered excellent service to the school. The school committee has been disposed to regard with favor the recommendations of these public-spirited business men. A thoroughly helpful spirit of sympathy and co-operation has been thus effected. The advisory committee has devoted much time and attention to the problems offered for their consideration. The meetings have always been well attended, and the interest exhibited has been an undeniable proof that opportunities for co-operation and working relations are as possible in this country as they are abroad.

The breadth of view exhibited by the advisory committee has been a pleasant surprise to those who regarded the innovation as a doubtful experiment. The committee has considered the school as part of the general system and has not urged that exemptions and privileges should be granted to the institution.

One valuable influence of the committee has been to put the school in the proper attitude toward its problem, an attitude of study and observation. What is done now is frankly considered provisional, the best under present information, but much better is to be discovered with further experiment. Thus a crystallization of the school to an unchangeable type is avoided, and a system of organization as well as an attitude of mind which permits steady progress is effected. Frank acknowledgment of present limitations is as important toward educational problems as toward other problems.

The present achievements of the school are undoubtedly crude and rudimentary, but with the forces of co-operation at work in the development of the institution, worthy attainments are certain to follow, and distinct contributions to the general question of commercial education may be expected.